



Customer service skills: Occupational employment, outlook, and wages

William Lawhorn | September 2018

These days, it may seem like robots can do it all. But humans still outperform machines in at least one important skill area: customer service.

Customer service skills include communication, patience, and knowledge of your company's products or services. You also should be friendly and understanding. In some occupations, you may need the ability to diagnose and fix problems or to make sales.

Lots of jobs involve customer service. In fact, occupations that require these skills accounted for about one-fourth of all employment in 2016, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). That's based on an analysis of

profiles from the *Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH)* that identified customer service skills as an important quality.

Occupations in which customer service skills are important include some that are projected to add many jobs or to have rapid employment growth over the 2016–26 decade. Others paid well above \$37,690, the median annual wage for all occupations in 2017.

Many jobs

The OOH identified customer service skills as important in 7 of the 10 occupations employing the most workers in the economy in 2016. As table 1 shows, [retail salespersons](#) topped the list of the largest occupations related to customer service in 2016, employing more than 4.6 million workers.

Table 1. Largest occupations that typically require customer service skills, 2016

Employment, 2016 and projected 2026; median annual wage, 2017; and education, experience, and training typically required in these occupations



Occupation	Employment, 2016	Employment, projected 2026	Median annual wage, 2017	Education typically required to enter
Retail salespersons	4,602,500	4,682,100	\$23,210	No formal educational credential
Cashiers	3,555,500	3,524,900	21,030	No formal educational credential
Combined food preparation and serving workers, including fast food	3,452,200	4,032,100	20,180	No formal educational credential
General office clerks	3,117,700	3,086,000	31,500	High school diploma or equivalent
Customer service representatives	2,784,500	2,920,800	32,890	High school diploma or equivalent
Waiters and waitresses	2,600,500	2,783,000	20,820	No formal educational credential
Stock clerks and order fillers	2,008,600	2,109,600	24,470	High school diploma or equivalent
Sales representatives, wholesale and manufacturing, except technical and scientific products	1,469,900	1,546,300	56,970	High school diploma or equivalent
General maintenance and repair workers	1,432,600	1,545,100	37,670	High school diploma or equivalent
Receptionists and information clerks	1,053,700	1,149,200	28,390	High school diploma or equivalent

Note: At the entry level, none of these occupations typically requires work experience in a related occupation. Sales representatives and general maintenance and repair workers typically need moderate-term on-the-job training to attain competency; all others typically require short-term on-the-job training.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Office of Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections.

Four of the occupations in table 1 (retail salespersons, [cashiers](#), [combined food preparation and serving workers](#), and [waiters and waitresses](#)) typically require no formal educational credential at the entry level; the other six typically require a high school diploma or equivalent. [Sales representatives](#) and [general maintenance and repair workers](#), the two highest paying occupations in the table, require moderate-term on-the-job training in addition to a diploma.

Together, the occupations in table 1 are projected to account for more than 27 million jobs by 2026.

Fast growth

Often, large occupations (such as those shown in table 1) are projected to add many jobs because they already employ millions of workers. Table 2 illustrates projections another way: It shows occupations related to customer service in which employment is expected to grow faster than the 7-percent average for all occupations.

Table 2. Fastest growing occupations that typically require customer service skills, projected 2016–26

Percent employment growth, projected 2016–26; employment, 2016; median annual wage, 2017; and education, experience, and training typically required in these occupations



Occupation	Employment growth, projected 2016–26 (percent)	Employment, 2016	Median annual wage, 2017	Education typically required to enter	On-the-job training typically required to attain competency
Nonfarm animal caretakers	24	241,500	\$22,950	High school diploma or equivalent	Short term
Combined food preparation and serving workers, including fast food	17	3,452,200	20,180	No formal educational credential	Short term
Web developers	15	162,900	67,990	Associate's degree	None
Dispensing opticians	15	77,600	36,250	High school diploma or equivalent	Long term
Heating, air conditioning, and refrigeration mechanics and installers	15	332,900	47,080	Postsecondary nondegree award	Long term
Appraisers and assessors of real estate	14	80,800	54,010	Bachelor's degree	Long term
Archivists	14	6,800	51,760	Master's degree	None
Curators	14	12,400	53,770	Master's degree	None
Skincare specialists	14	61,300	30,080	Postsecondary nondegree award	None
Barbers	13	56,400	25,650	Postsecondary nondegree award	None

Note: At the entry level, none of these occupations typically requires work experience in a related occupation.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Office of Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections.

Combined food preparation and serving workers appears in both tables 1 and 2. Although its rate of employment growth is not expected to be as fast as that of [nonfarm animal caretakers](#), because it is a much larger occupation, it is projected to add nearly 10 times as many jobs as nonfarm animal caretakers.

The education typically required to enter the rapidly growing occupations shown in table 2 ranges from no formal educational credential (for combined food preparation and serving workers) to a master's degree (for [archivists and curators](#)).

Of the occupations presented in table 2, half had median annual wages that were higher than the median wage for all occupations. [Web developers](#), the highest paying occupation in the table, also was among the highest paying occupations in which customer service skills are important.

High wages

Table 3 shows the highest paying occupations that require customer service skills; [sales managers](#) made more than triple the median annual wage for all occupations in 2017.

Table 3. Highest paying occupations that typically require customer service skills, 2017

Median annual wage, 2017; employment, 2016 and projected 2026; and education, experience, and training typically required in these occupations



Occupation	Median annual wage, 2017	Employment, 2016	Employment, projected 2026	Education typically required to enter	Work experience typically required to enter	On-the-job training typically required to attain competency
Sales managers	\$121,060	385,500	414,400	Bachelor's degree	Less than 5 years	None
Construction managers	91,370	403,800	448,600	Bachelor's degree	None	Moderate term
Sales representatives, wholesale and manufacturing, technical and scientific products	78,830	343,600	361,300	Bachelor's degree	None	Moderate term
Logisticians	74,590	148,700	159,000	Bachelor's degree	None	None
Gaming managers	72,930	4,500	4,600	High school diploma or equivalent	Less than 5 years	None
Captains, mates, and pilots of water vessels	70,920	38,800	42,200	Postsecondary nondegree award	Less than 5 years	None
Web developers	67,990	162,900	187,200	Associate's degree	None	None
Securities, commodities, and financial services sales agents	63,780	375,700	398,900	Bachelor's degree	None	Moderate term
Artists and related workers, all other	63,540	12,800	13,500	No formal educational credential	None	Moderate term
Computer network support specialists	62,340	198,800	215,200	Associate's degree	None	None

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Office of Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections.

With higher wages come higher entry-level requirements: Most of the occupations in table 3 typically require at least a college degree and, for some, experience or on-the-job training.

The occupations in table 3 are projected to have about 2 million jobs overall by 2026.

For more information

The occupations highlighted in this article are among those in which BLS economists determined that customer service skills are an important quality for workers. More information is available in the *OOH* about these occupations, as well as hundreds of others. The *OOH* describes job duties, outlook, pay, and more—including which qualities, such as customer service skills, are important in each occupation.

With data from the BLS [Occupational Requirements Survey](#), you can identify occupations that [align with your work preferences](#). You also may find occupations of interest by entering “customer service skills” as your search term in the O*NET OnLine [occupation search](#) tool.

William Lawhorn is an economist in the Office of Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections, BLS. He can be reached at lawhorn.william@bls.gov.

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